



## Un(s)pecified space: A Spatial Reading of *Bravely Fought the Queen*

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### Abstract

Mahesh Dattani's plays thought to be the mirrors of contemporary Indian society. Discussing the undercurrent of

so-called 'modern life'- he is one of the pioneers in highlighting the ever changing human relations vis-à-vis space and time. In this very paper, a spatial reading has been attempted regarding Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen*. The focus of this paper is to produce a spatial reading of *Bravely Fought the Queen* to understand what dynamic roles the spaces in the text play in the construction of this gendered identity and similarly how gendered practices and the subversion of them causes the space to modify itself.

**Keywords:** Gender, dynamic, contemporary, Indian, dynamic, identity.

## 1. Introduction

Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* is a stage play of three acts where the different domains of domination in the Indian Society are explicitly portrayed. The playwright presents the story in two particular settings of House of Dolly and Jiten Trivedi and the Office of Jiten and Nitin Trivedi. The two sets, one public and one private sphere alongside the spatial practices performed by the characters, representation of space, and the dialogical condition in the creation of lived or representational space, make it intriguing to approach this play. Another primary concern of this play is gendered identity and role-play maintained by the characters. The essay is divided into three parts. The first part looks to discuss the basic premises of spatial criticism and tries to explain how it can be used for a proper understanding of gendered practices. The later parts of the paper will focus on explaining different parts of the play based on the complexity of gendered space and how both space and gender act as inter-illuminating factors in construction and subversion of each other.

## 2. Incorporation of Space in literary studies:

Spatial criticism, in its primary sense, is a critical study of place and space. It came as a critical response to and appropriation of conventional conceptualizations of space, for example, Cartesian, Newtonian, the Kantian notion of space (Lefevre 1), and conventional privileging of history and temporality over space (Wegner 180). The basic premises of spatial criticism are that space is not a static container waiting to be fulfilled by contents, and space like time is always in the process of making. The place is not fixed. The place is both a production and a force. The place is both a political site of domination and resistance. Lefevre's conceptual triad in dynamic construction and modification of space is necessary for understanding the production of space. The triad includes "spatial practices," "representations of space," and "representational space." The spatial practices are "which embraces production and reproduction, and the particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of each social formation." "Representation of Space" refers to the codification of a particular space, and "Representational space" can be termed only as "lived space" which remain in the dialogue between "spatial practices" and "representation of space" (33). With the account of Lefevre, it becomes clear that space does not remain in a vacuum, and it is always in the process of making. Spatial reading can be an intriguing point of view to enter into gendered identity and role play.

Continuously enforced and controlled behavior in a particular space makes it naturalized and the other behaviors unnatural. It seems crucial to understand the gendered spheres and how both men and women reenact natural behavior in particular spaces. In most cases, practices in a particular space are controlled by patriarchal ideals, and therefore it naturalizes the domination of women. According to Daphne Spain, the patriarchal Society ensures spatial segregation to reduce

women's access to socially valued knowledge (140). Linda McDowell, in her book *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding feminist geographies*, addresses the patriarchal tendency of setting boundaries and codification of men and women's "proper place." In that codification, the public sphere was supposed to be "an encompassing concept along with citizenship and human rights, it becomes an unquestioned ground for exclusion," If one begins to consider that the private sphere is in the control of women, it would be wrong because home is equally a man's place as the public sphere is (qtd in Israel 183). However, space is a political site of control; it is a site for resistance too. Women, who are dominated by patriarchal practices that often define the space, they can resist by subverting the space decorum. Space can construct one's identity, and similarly, one's practice can change how space can be perceived.

### **3. Space in *Bravely Fought the Queen*:**

Mahesh Dattani's play *Bravely Fought the Queen* is one such text where the public and private spheres are separated and, in a sense, the public sphere is specifically for men and in the private sphere women find a little sense of agency when their husbands are outside. However, the agency they find in commanding their servants has nothing to do in emancipating them. Their husbands' existence in the house is felt even when they are not there. Herein lies the problem of gendering the home as women's space. The wives, Dolly, and Alka Trivedi are acting within the small opportunity they are given. The domain of domination changes with time and space. Being a homosexual person, Nitin's identity as a man changes with the change of space. In-office and in front of Jiten, he seems emasculated. Whereas, he seems to be performing the role of a heteronormative man in his house. In the office, Sridhar is being dominated for being an employee of the Trivedi

brothers. Class here plays a significant role. However, in his home, he plays the role of a dominating patriarch. The patriarchal system removes women from the public sphere and imprisons them within the private sphere. In the private sphere, both Dolly and Alka face domination as their work in the house has no exchange value, as in the case of Nitin and Jiten. A stark juxtaposition has been made by Dolly to show, how as the twin house, the sisters too are owned.

Dolly: Twin houses. Right in the middle of nowhere.

Lalitha: (nods in agreement). It is so inconvenient for us; I cannot tell you! Mind you, once there, it looks as busy as anything. Nevertheless- over here- you don't have neighbors yet. Don't you feel, you know, isolated?

Dolly: (Laughs had, then stops). Oh! I've cracked my mask. (Pats her mask) Isolated. Yes. But they were adamant. They wanted huge beautiful houses. Twin houses. Side by side. One for each brother. And two sisters! One for each brother! (Dattani 9)

#### 4. The sense and possession of 'space'

The objectification of the two sisters seems apparent in the above section. The isolated nature of the houses makes it impossible for the sisters to make interactions with the people. As a result, just as the brothers dominate them, the positions of the houses dominate their life too. The houses, therefore, can be seen as phallic symbols. The public sphere (for example, parties) for the female characters are extensions of the private sphere. Their husbands' demands make sure that they do what they are doing and do not go beyond the "boundaries." Therefore, the parties do not give any scope of refreshment for them. The female characters have no sense of a differential space where the hierarchy is less powerful. Even their name becomes less critical in the parties than their husbands' (Dattani 5).

It is not only the space that controls the behavior; the practices often resist or subverts the normative space decorum as well. According to Low and Lawrence-Zuniga,

*because social practice activates spatial meanings, they are not fixed in space but are invoked by actors, men, and women, who bring their discursive knowledge and strategic intentions to the interpretation of spatial meanings.*

*(qtd. in Beebe et al. 530)*

If we consider in this regard, the homosocial space that is created because of the interaction between Lalitha, Alka, and Dolly, it can become apparent. If the isolation of the houses causes Dolly and Alka's life to become non-happening, they are coping by creating a space suitable for themselves. Even though Alka is forbidden to have rum in the house, she is doing so, and in her way, she is subverting the naturalized spatial practice. Her dancing in the rain can be considered a subversion of practices demanded of her in the public sphere. If we consider the vectors of domination, (i.e., age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, et cetera.) determines the hierarchal relationship in both houses and office. In the capitalist culture, the aging Baa has as much value as the property that she possesses. Another subversion of naturalized spatial practice is seen when the kitchen becomes the place of a homosexual love affair between the auto driver and Nitin.

In the home, the sisters are given an illusion of agency over their servants. However, when they are acting following this structure provided by the patriarch. This sense of agency benumbs their spirit of resistance and often is used by the brothers against them. Alka, who is a free spirit, cannot cope with the constant demands that are made upon her. She drinks to benumb her pain. Even the position of the houses makes disciplinary actions taken against her more powerful.

She is "walled out" of her house for being alcoholic once. However, the walling out of Alka can be termed as distinctly disciplinary action. Walling in the sisters in such an isolated place, too, can be considered as a form of punishment. Thus, the positioning of the house is making the life of the sisters more difficult.

## 5. Conclusion

Mahesh Dattani's *Bravely Fought the Queen* gives a vivid account of different domains of domination in the Indian Society. Spatial reading of the text gives a different perspective to reach the point of domination. It shows how because of necessary adjustments made in different spaces gain or lose agency. It shows how normative spatial practices can often be subverted and how it is subverted in the text. The essay tried to give an account of dialogic conditions between spatial practice and representation and codification of space.

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